

## **BREAKING DOWN DENOMINATIONAL BARRIERS**

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Ecumenical organizations are calling for the breaking down of denominational barriers and this philosophy has been adopted by countless professing Christians. On almost a daily basis I get e-mails from these people, challenging me to get rid of my denominational mentality and to “fall in love with Jesus” instead. In their minds, it is not possible to love the Lord if one has a strong doctrinal mindset.

For example, at the Promise Keepers Clergy Conference in Atlanta in February 1996, the more than 39,000 pastors attending were urged to commit themselves to the “Atlanta Covenant.” One of the points of this seven-part document urges pastors to reach beyond racial and DENOMINATIONAL barriers.” Former football coach Bill McCartney made the following statement at this meeting: “Contention between denominations has gone on long enough. If the church ever stood together, Almighty God would have his way.”

### **THE “BREAKING DOWN DENOMINATIONAL WALLS” MENTALITY IGNORES APOSTASY**

This thinking sounds good to this itching-ear generation (2 Tim. 4:3-4), but it ignores the wretchedly apostate condition of a great many of the denominations.

Respected evangelical leader Harold Lindsell gave this testimony in regard to the mainline denominations:

“It is not unfair to allege that among denominations like Episcopal, United Methodist, United Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. THERE IS NOT A SINGLE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY THAT TAKES A STAND IN FAVOR OF BIBLICAL INFALLIBILITY. AND THERE IS NOT A SINGLE SEMINARY WHERE THERE ARE NOT FACULTY MEMBERS WHO DISAVOW ONE OR MORE OF THE MAJOR TEACHINGS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH” (Harold Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, Zondervan, 1976, pp. 145-146.)

“Apostasy” refers to falling away from the true New Testament faith, and it is not a figment of a fundamentalist’s imagination; it is a Bible doctrine. The New Testament describes two separate streams of “Christianity” operating side by side throughout the church age.

First, there are sound apostolic churches, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. They will be persecuted, hated, despised, yet they will continue holding to the New Testament faith century after century until Christ’s return. The Lord Jesus promised His

faithful ones: “Lo, I am with you alway, EVEN TO THE END OF THE WORLD” (Matthew 28:20).

Second, there are apostate churches, which will increase in number and grow worse and worse as the centuries pass. Consider the following Scriptures:

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13).

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Peter. 2:1-3).

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3-4).

The parables of Christ in Matthew 13 depict the course of this present “church age” and describe a progression of apostasy. The parable of the leaven in Mat. 13:33, for example, describes a woman putting leaven into three measures of meal, “*till the whole was leavened.*” Leaven in Scripture stands for sin and error (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). Thus the parable tells us that the error that was introduced by false teachers even during the days of the apostles will gradually increase through the centuries until the entire religious system is leavened. The ultimate fulfillment of this is in Revelation 17.

Another passage that teaches the same truth is 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8. “*For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.*”

The “mystery of iniquity” is that program of evil whereby the devil is attempting to corrupt the churches of Jesus Christ by sowing tares and apostasy. It is associated with “Mystery Babylon the Great” in Revelation 17. In the days of the apostles the “mystery of iniquity” was already working, and it will culminate in the promotion of the man of sin, the Wicked One, the Antichrist, who will assume the throne of this world for a brief span. We are told that the culmination of this will not occur until just prior to the return of Christ, because the Wicked One will be destroyed “with the brightness of his coming.”

We see the direct fulfillment of these prophecies in the Christian world today. It is clearly witnessed in heretical bodies such as the Roman Catholic Church and the liberal Protestant and Baptist denominations associated with the World Council of Churches. It is also evident in the ecumenical movement, which is calling for unity in diversity at the expense of biblical truth and which is breaking down the walls of separation between truth and error.

Modernism and apostasy has permeated the mainline Christian denominations. Any call, therefore, to breach denominational barriers today, is a call to yoke truth together with error and is an open denial of the biblical doctrine of separation.

### **THE “BREAKING DOWN DENOMINATIONAL WALLS” MENTALITY IGNORES THE IMPORTANCE OF BIBLE DOCTRINE**

The push to “break down denominational walls” also ignores the fact that denominational differences are largely doctrinal differences, and the Bible highly exalts doctrine. The Scripture was given for doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16).

While some divisions between Christians are manmade and unnecessary, many others, most, in fact, are doctrinal.

Why, for example, is an Episcopal church different from an independent Baptist church? They have different doctrine. One teaches baptismal regeneration; the other, that baptism is symbolic only. One baptizes infants; the other practices believer’s baptism. One sprinkles; the other immerses. One has a priesthood; the other has pastors and deacons. One has a hierarchical church structure; the other practices the autonomy of the assembly. One interprets prophecy literally and is looking for the imminent return of Jesus Christ; the other interprets prophecy symbolically and is working to establish the kingdom of God on earth. One allows its leaders and members to hold every sort of heresy and immorality; the other (generally speaking) practices discipline and separation.

What is the difference between an Assemblies of God congregation and an independent Baptist church? Again, it is doctrine. One believes the baptism of the Holy Spirit is subsequent to salvation and is something the believer must seek and that its manifestation

is tongues-speaking; the other believes the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred at Pentecost and that every believer is baptized by the Holy Spirit when he is saved. One believes the sign gifts are operative today; the other believes the sign gifts were given to the apostles and ceased with their passing. One believes the Holy Spirit “slays” people; the other, that “spirit slaying” is unscriptural. One believes the gift of tongues is operative today; the other, that the gift of tongues had a temporary purpose that ceased in the first century. One believes salvation can be lost; the other, that salvation is eternally secure. One believes ecumenical unity is the work of the Holy Spirit; the other believes ecumenical unity is the work of the devil.

Those who call for the removal of denominational divisions are ignoring these serious doctrinal differences. Any Bible doctrine worth believing is worth fighting for.

When Paul wrote to Timothy to instruct him in the work of the Lord, he did not tell him to “lighten up” and to ignore doctrinal differences. He solemnly instructed him to remain absolutely steadfast in the apostolic doctrine and not to allow ANY other doctrine to be taught.

“As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach NO OTHER DOCTRINE” (1 Timothy 1:3).

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, THE SAME commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

The believer is instructed to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). There is not a hint here or anywhere else in Scripture that some part of the Christian faith is of such little importance that it is to be disregarded for the sake of a broader unity.

The ecumenical attitude toward doctrine and the push to “break down denominational” walls is not Scriptural and must be resisted.

Those who have the most to lose from the ecumenical call to dissolve denominational walls are those whose doctrine is based upon the Word of God.

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